AG PEN PAL PROGRAM

Program Guide

Classrooms
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Thank you for committing to a year in the Ag Pen Pal Program. On behalf of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation, thank you for welcoming an Ag Pen Pal to your classroom!

The Ag Pen Pal Program began in the 1990-1991 school year with a goal of connecting 20 classrooms to 20 farmers and ranchers to exchange three letters throughout the school year to introduce urban students to where their food comes from.

Today, the Ag Pen Pal Program provides a real-life connection to the agriculture community so students can see the daily life of a farmer or rancher. Every year this program matches volunteers to help classrooms understand and appreciate the agriculture around them.

This guide contains ideas to get started and resources available to you. You can access the guide online at www.nefbfoundation.org/agpenpal.

In addition to this guide, you will receive monthly e-newsletters (Between the Rows) with tips for each letter, a highlight of a current Ag Pen Pal, and ways to bring agriculture to the classroom. These newsletters will also serve as a reminder to write your letters.

Thank you for participating in the Ag Pen Pal Program. We are looking forward to a great year connecting farmers and ranchers to classrooms across the state. This program would not be a success without you!
Agriculture in the Classroom® is a program coordinated by the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization and supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Its goal is to help students gain a greater awareness of the role of agriculture in the economy and society, so that they may become citizens who support wise agricultural policies. The program is carried out in each state, according to state needs and interests, by individuals representing farm organizations, agribusiness, education, and government.

The USDA established Agriculture in the Classroom in 1981. It has the endorsement of all living former Secretaries of Agriculture, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, the National Conference of State Legislatures, most of the Governors of the States, and the major agricultural organizations and commodity groups. Significant progress has been made through these partnerships of agriculture, business, education, government, and dedicated volunteers.

Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) is a statewide program that helps PreK-12 grade students and teachers develop an awareness and understanding that agriculture is their source of life’s necessities. AITC has a long history of creating resources tied to state education content standards to assist teachers and volunteers in connecting students to their source of food, fiber, and fuel – agriculture!

In Nebraska, Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation leads the Agriculture in the Classroom program.

The mission of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation is to engage youth, educators, and the general public to promote an understanding of the vital importance of agriculture to all Nebraskans. Learn more at www.nefbfoundation.org.

The Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation is a non-profit charitable organization and has been determined as exempt from Federal Income Tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions or donations may be tax deductible.
Program Guidelines

The Ag Pen Pal Program connects a farmer or rancher with a classroom during the school year. The goal is for the pair to exchange letters three times during the school year. Letters can be in the form of mailed letters or e-mail. Please discuss the schedule and how you will communicate with your Ag Pen Pal farm/ranch when you send the first letter. Although only three letters are required, additional touchpoints are welcome.

As a Classroom Ag Pen Pal, please send your letters to the farmer/rancher by the following dates:

- October 31
- February 28
- April 30

If for some reason your letter will be late, please contact your farm/ranch and let them know when they can expect your letter and if it will be coming in the mail or email. If you have questions or cannot get in touch with your pen pal, please contact the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation at (402) 421-4747 or agpenpal@nefb.org right away. Please do not wait until the end of the school year to report a lack of connection. We can help you get in touch or match you with a new farm/ranch pen pal.

One of the keys to success in the program is keeping in touch. Send your pen pal a note when you receive their letter. You can also determine ahead of time if you will have each student send a letter or if you will send a class letter. Please know that most pen pals will send you one letter in return and will answer questions rather than write each student back.
**Meet Me Questionnaire**

My name is:

My favorite color is:

My favorite food is:

My favorite animal is:

My favorite thing about school is:

Something I would like you to know about me:

My favorite farm animal is:

My favorite subject in school is ________________ because...

When I hang out with my friends, I really love to...

If I could go any place in the world, I would go to...

Attach a picture of the student if possible

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**Let Me Show You**

Give the writing prompt “I wanted to write and tell you all about something that I have been working on in class!” Try to include photos of their projects when sending this letter.

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**Share What You’ve Been Doing**

Not sure where to begin? Encourage your student to start small. Begin writing about a pet, what they did that week, or what they love to eat.
Ask Questions

Pen Pal writing is a conversation on paper. Make sure your students include a few questions to keep the conversation going. It also shows your farmer or rancher that your students are interested in what they do, too.

Personalize It

Get creative! Allow students to include drawings, stickers, or little things that show their personality. It doesn’t have to be big or grand. Write on colored paper or allow the student to sign their name in a special way.

Play Stenographer

As the teacher, play stenographer and write a sentence as the student says it.

Collage It

Create a collage of pictures (cut out from a magazine) of things that represent each student and have the students write a sentence about their collage.
Bring Agriculture into Your Classroom!

Nebraska AITC has a long history of creating resources tied to state education standards to assist teachers in connecting their students to their source of food, fiber, and fuel – agriculture!

**Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom**
- Offers materials to encourage active learning with hands-on activities for youth.
- Creates instructional materials aligned to Nebraska State Standards.
- Equips teachers with free programs and resources to bring agriculture alive in the classroom.

**Learn More**
Visit [www.nefbfoundation.org](http://www.nefbfoundation.org) to view all programs and resources!

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**Get Involved!**

**Classroom Visits.** AITC staff leads grade-specific, hands-on, in-person or virtual lessons aligned to state standards for grades K-5 in schools across Nebraska.

**Virtual Field Trips.** Connect with a farmer via a live, video-chat to see inside the barn doors of a real Nebraska farm. Events are scheduled throughout the school year and sign-up information can be found online and in the newsletter.

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**Grants & Awards**

**Field Trip Grants.** PreK- 8th grade teachers can apply to receive up to $700 in transportation funding to travel to a working farm or ranch.

**Teacher of the Year.** K-8 grade teachers can apply in October to be recognized for their innovative methods to incorporate agriculture into their classroom. Winners receive an all-expense paid trip to the National Agriculture in the Classroom conference, a book bundle, and a $250 cash prize.
**Teacher Resources**

*AgMag.* This online learning tool introduces new, non-fiction text in a weekly reader style magazine to support Nebraska fourth grade standards. The accompanying teacher’s guide provides ideas for use in the classroom and standard connections.

*Curriculum Matrix.* Search this free, online, standards-based curriculum map for K-12 grade teachers. Instructional, classroom-ready resources and lessons are included in this matrix.

*Lesson Plan Activities.* Find the perfect activity to enhance your lesson with these hands-on activities. These grade-specific, standard-aligned activities allow K-12 grade students to learn through their senses.

*Literature Guides.* Each guide introduces a beautiful, imaginative, lively text or picture book and is accompanied by a lesson plan.

*Mapping Our Food.* A free resource for first grade classrooms, this kit is full of lesson plans, letters from youth farmers, posters, and a map with stickers for lessons aligned to social studies and language arts standards.

*Nebraska Interactive Map.* This online resource gives students an interactive and useful way to understand facts, events, and places that impact our daily lives as they relate to agriculture. Lessons aligned to *The Nebraska Adventure* and fourth grade social studies standards are available on the website. [www.nefbmap.org](http://www.nefbmap.org).

*Supplemental Materials.* Explore these informative cards, posters, coloring pages, and games that are informative across all ages in all educational settings. Request a hard copy or view online!

*Virtual and At-Home Learning.* Reimagined resources promote socially distanced activities suitable for the classroom or at-home. Experience learning through Live Experiences, Self-Guided Opportunities, Activity Guides, and Just for Fun Resources.
Your local paper may enjoy the opportunity to report on your participation in the Ag Pen Pal program. Please feel free to share the good news!

Some of the subjects you could share with media are:
- Writing the letters to the pen pal
- Taking a trip to your pen pals farm or ranch
- The impact the Ag Pen Pal program has had on the students
- The importance of teaching children about agriculture

If you would like help in creating a news article or help with contacting your local media, please contact the Foundation at (402) 421-4747 or at agpenpal@nefb.org.

Stories are an important tool for education and fundraising efforts. Stories help us reflect on our work, demonstrate the difference made in people’s lives, generate support, and build a greater understanding of our programs to the public. If you have stories and/or pictures that you would like to share, please email them to agpenpal@nefb.org.
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Your Match For The 2021-2022 School Year